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Asphalt

and other Poems

by

Orick Johns



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ASPHALT
and Other Poems



ASPHALT

By Orrick Johns

MUSHROOMS

By Alfred Kreymborg

THE BOOK OF SELF

By James Oppenheim

THE COLLECTED POEMS

of William H. Davies

OTHERS (1916)

*An Anthology of the New
Verse*

ASPHALT
and Other Poems
By Orrick Johns



New York . Alfred A. Knopf . Mcmxvii

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PS 3519
.0135 A 8
1917

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

~~\$1.25~~

MAY 12 1917

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no. 11

To Peggy

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EBB SAND AND STARS

- EBB SAND AND STARS III

Acknowledgment is hereby made to the editors of *Reedy's Mirror*; *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*; *The Smart Set*; *The Forum*; *The Poetry Review*; *The Poetry Journal*; and *Contemporary Verse*, for permission to reprint many of the poems included in this volume.

THE AUTHOR.

ASPHALT

BREAD

BREAD, is it bread?
Den go an' git yer head
Beaten inta jelly by de bulls!
Dey'll preach ta yer a spell,
An' ya'll never go ta hell,
So long as yer ain't tired o' bein' gulls!

Bread, bread, bread,
Say, son, do you see red?
Say, sonny, kin ya look wid yer eyes?
Bread, bread, bread,
An' a comrade lyin' dead —
It's nothin' if ya listen ta *their* lies!

Take another pull
Of de bughouse till yer full —
You don't want no *thinkin'* in yer mind!
Strain, strain, strain,
But dontcha break de chain,
An' dontcha let de system git behind!

BREAD

Bread, bread, bread,
Say, son, do you see red?
 Say, sonny, kin ya look wid yer eyes?
Bread, bread, bread,
An' a comrade lyin' dead —
 It's nothin' if ya listen ta *their* lies!

Life, is it life?
Aw, cut it wid a knife!
 Aw, take it out in lookin' at de moon!
Say, wot's de use o' talk?
Walk, walk, walk —
 Walk, an' let de bosses pay de tune!

Bread, bread, bread,
Say, son, do you see red?
 Say, sonny, kin ya look wid yer eyes?
Bread, bread, bread,
An' a comrade lyin' dead —
 It's nothin' if ya listen ta *their* lies!

HOME

HOME? Say, wotta ya mean, guy,
Wotta ya tryin' ta pass me?
Home? Say, wotta ya givin' me —
You ain't tryin' ta gas me?
I ain't seen no such a place —
Guess ya thought ya'd played de ace!
Home? Say, guy, you got a face,—
Wotta ya mean by home?

Home? Say, wotta ya mean, guy,
Wotcha tryin' ta hand me?
Home? I reckon any home
Wouldn't a had ta canned *me*.
Say, guy, dontcha make no jokes!
I got tired o' hearin' blokes
Ask me, "Ain'tcha got no folks?"
Wotta ya mean by home?

Home? Say, wotta ya mean, guy —
Wotcha slippin' over?

HOME

Home? Say, wot's de answer, guy?
Don't I look in clover?
Git dis in yer little dome —
Sittin' here behind de foam's
A dam sight softer flop 'an home!
Home? Say, wotta ya mean?

NEWS

*J*OINAL, *Evenin' Joinal!*

Warships off de coast!
Give de guy his change, Sam —
Mister, here's your *Post*.
Gawd, but it's a' gittin' cold,—
Say, is all dem *Masses* sold?
Guess dat sheet has took a hold —
Freezin', ain't it most?

Joinal, Evenin' Joinal!

Sam, let's have a *Mail*.
Yessir, just one *Masses* left —
(Dat guy's got de kale!)
Git me, bo,— I need a drink!
Smell dat rotten sewer stink? —
Say, wot t'ell ya doin', gink,
Cantcha make a sale?

Joinal, Evenin' Joinal!

Latest from de Street!
Say, dat dame's a peacherine —
Like ta see *her* eat!

NEWS

Jesus Aitch, here, wot's about?
You git on an' shut yer mout'!
Masses? *Masses* all sold out—
Sam, d'ya read dat sheet?

THE CYNIC

YA quit yer job? I gotcha —
I seen de way it works:
Ya buys some rags 'at's flossy
An' ya travels wid de clerks;
Ya t'inks yer feelin' lonesome
An' ya'd like ta have a home —
So ya goes an' gits a license
Wid a solid ivory dome!

About de end o' fall
De first begins ta squall —
Say, it ain't no use at all
Ta holler den!

Ya quit yer job? I gotcha —
A job fer life's de stuff:
Ya t'inks ya got a feller
Wot's a di'mond in de rough;
Say, di'monds turns out phoney,
But ya can't bring no complaint;

THE CYNIC

An' raisin' kids fer *hunger*?
You kin do it, kid — I ain't!

Yer Eve before de Fall
Till de kids begins ta squall —
Say, it ain't no use at all
Ta holler den!

POLITICIANS

DE way dem fellers jaws
Of de State, an' Gawd, an' Laws,
Dey'd give ya room ta t'ink dey was de t'ree;
Ya'd say dere *breath* was legal,
An' dat dey was Gawd's own ekal,
An' dey wasn't born somehow like you an' me!

It's talk, talk, talk,
An' *den* dey walks de chalk,
But it's never quite de same as wot they *do!*
It's "feller men an' friends"—
But believe me, bo, dat ends!
When dey gits alone it's me a' pluckin' you!

When dem guys is on dere legs
Say, bo, dey'll walk on eggs—
Ya'd t'ink dere folks had growed 'em under glass!
But believe me, tain't de same
When dere back into de game—
It's grab de stuff, an' do it rough, an' don't let nut-
tin' pass!

POLITICIANS

It's talk, talk, talk,
An' *den* dey walks de chalk,
 But it's never quite de same as wot they *do!*
It's "feller men an' friends"—
But believe me, bo, dat ends!
 When dey gits alone it's me a' pluckin' you!

Say, let 'em t'row dat bluff
If dey ain't got cards enuff,
 Let 'em shuffle Gawd an' glory in de pack!
If ya *know*, ya'll understand
Dat when any guy's a man—
 Well, bo, dere ain't much change a'comin' back!

It's talk, talk, talk,
An' *den* dey walks de chalk,
 But it's never quite de same as wot they *do!*
It's "feller men an' friends"—
But believe me, bo, dat ends!
 When dey gits alone it's me a' pluckin' you!

BROADWAY

SAY, dat street's de real stuff,
She dolls herself wid art;
Gee, but she don't t'row no bluff —
If she *ain't* got no heart!

In de sun she blinks,
In de rain she drinks —
Say, she's de dame ta love!
She's dere, an' bo's,
Anyt'ing goes —
But she gives a guy de shove!

Dat ol' gal's de dancin' kid,
She dances twenty mile,
She never tells ya wot ya've did,
An' she never draws yer bile!

She's slim an' neat,
She rests yer feet,

BROADWAY

She treats ya on de square!
But it's down ya go
If she loves ya, bo —
It's down ya go, fer fair!

ELECTION

GIT de glad hand, sonny?
Stick ya out a mit?
Slip ya 'cross a dollar? —
Take de stuff an' git!
Don't go raise no holler —
Golly, dat's yer pay!
Git in line an' foller,
It's election day!

Votin' an' a'votin',
Dames wants it too!
Wot's it ever done fer us?
Say, ain't it true!

Money's comin' easy,
Votes is hard ta git —
Ain't no use how ya votes
It lets dem fellers sit!
See dem blues a'totin' guns
Underneat' dere coat?

ELECTION

Dat's de stuff, de real stuff,
De stuff behind de vote!

Votin' an' a'votin',
Dames wants it too!
Wot's it ever done fer us?
Say, ain't it true!

THE LITTLE KID

I RECKON dat feller Molly's got
(Say, *he* was fresh, th' god dam sot!)
I reckon dat rich guy Molly's got
Ain't wort' enough fer me!
I reckon dey gotta pass a smile,
An' be a real guy fer a while —
I reckon *all* dat feller's pile
Ain't enough fer me!

Gee, but I got a feed to-night,
I got a guy dat acted white!
Gee, but I got a time to-night
An' dat's de style fer me!
He wasn't dere in de way o' cash,
But say, he had *some* kind o' flash!
Gee, dat guy had a lovely mash
If he *only* slipped me t'ree!

Gotta have rent er beat dis shack,
Hope dat Sad'day night ain't slack —

THE LITTLE KID

But gee, I wish dat guy'd come back
An' take me on a spree!
Gawd, dis room is hellish hot!
Maybe I'm easy, maybe not,
But I reckon dat rich guy Molly's got
Ain't wort' enough fer me!

RELIGION

SINGIN' hymns an' singin' hymns,
Howlin' fit ta burst,
Bawlin' t'ings up at de Lord,
But gee, dat ain't de worst!
Come right up an' brace a gink —
Guess I got another think!
Dis prayin'-business makes a stink —
It got me, bo, at first.

Singin' hymns an' singin' hymns,
Screechin' fit ta croak;
Wake a guy on Sunday!
(Say, dat's a joke!)
I don't want no prayin', bo,
Ain't partic'lar where I go —
Slip me just five c's er so
Fer coffee an' a smoke.

Singin' hymns an' singin' hymns,
Bellerin' every night;

RELIGION

Guess dem folks'll see de Lord,
An' dat'll be *some* sight!
Shoutin' prayers an' takin' dough,
Say, you got it easy, bo —
Slip a guy a jit . . . huh, no?
Gee, dis Christ's a tight!

THE NOVICE

I BEEN in an' I been out —
Pass dat can o' beer!
Ain't no t'ing ta rave about,
Neither way ya steer.
I been in an' I been out —
Say, you young un', try de spout!
Ain't no t'ing dat I could tout,
Neither way ya go, bo.

I been in an' I been out —
Honest — wot's de diff?
Any guy dat works, bo —
Say, dat guy's a stiff!
Stealin' ain't so *rare* a sin!
But *dey* ain't never gittin' in!
An' blokes likes us is up agin it
Either way wid 'em, bo!

I been in an' I been out,
Say, I'll git in some more!

THE NOVICE

Ain't no other trick, bo,
Once de bulls is sore.
Out ya starve an' in ya eat,
In's a bed an' out's de street,
Out yer broke an' in *dey* treat!
Take it either way, bo.

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

GEE, de papers makes a show
Of a gal dat marries dough —
An' wot's de use in advertisin' *dat!*

If ya gotta make yer bed

Wid de same guy till yer dead —

Say! it seems ta me ya'd wanta keep it underneat'
yer hat!

Marryin' an' marryin'—

Wot's de big idee?

Fer mine I travels private

Wid a guy dat knows I'm free!

Marryin' an' marryin',

Tyin' up fer life —

Say, bo! I hope ta Gawd *you* never

Treat *me* like a wife!

Sometimes ya see a feller

Wot ya know ain't got no yeller,

An' he asks ya if yer game ta blow de night.

Ya sticks him out a hand

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

An' he's gotcha till he's canned —

Dat's marryin' an' marryin', an' den yer married
right!

Marryin' an' marryin'—

Wot's de big idee?

Fer mine I travels private

Wid a guy dat knows I'm free!

Marryin' an' marryin',

Tyin' up fer life —

Say, bo! I hope ta Gawd *you* never

Treat *me* like a wife!

HOSPITAL

I WANTA sit around a little table,
I wanta see de jaws a'waggin' hard,—
Gee, I wish ta Gawd dat I was able
Ta git away an' chatter wid a pard!

Aw, de sickness, dat ain't much,
When yer dippy like a crutch,
But de t'ing dat beats de dutch
Is gittin' well!

I wanta hear de screeches an' de scrunches,
De skwankin' an' de squealin' of de trains;
I wanta find a pal an' *bum* my lunches —
Gee, doc, dis quiet's gittin' in my brains!

Aw, de sickness, dat ain't much,
When yer dippy like a crutch,
But de t'ing dat beats de dutch
Is gittin' well!

HOSPITAL

Say, doc, just put me wise to sump'n queer —
I wasn't wort' yer savin' from de dead —
But Gawd! if I got hungry *out* of here,
Dey'd send me up de road fer liftin' bread!

Aw, de sickness, dat ain't much,
When yer dippy like a crutch,
But de t'ing dat beats de dutch
Is gittin' well!

MOBILISATION

DERE goin' out fer glory,—
Say, ya gotta stop an' look!
It's a sight dat grips a feller
Till he wants ta take de hook!
Dere goin' out fer glory
An' dey'll find it in de mud —
Cause *some* un started *sump'n*,
An' de bosses, dey want blood!

Gawd, de youth dem fellers' got
In dere breasts!
An' de hair dem fellers' got
On dere chests!
Say, it's gran' ta see de show
Wid de guns a' shinin' so —
But wot ta hell dere goin' fer twon't do ta
know!

Dere goin' out fer glory
'Cause de flag is feelin' mad,

MOBILISATION

It's hangin' kinda limplike
An' dey say its pulse is bad.
Dere goin' out fer glory —
An' dat's a kind o' prize
Wot ya'll find is sump'n diff'rent
When it bats ya in de eyes!

Gawd, de youth dem fellers' got
In dere breasts!
An' de hair dem fellers' got
On dere chests!
Say, it's gran' ta see de show
Wid de guns a'shinin' so —
But wot ta hell dere goin' fer twon't do ta
know!

HUNGER

I WONDER if de guys
Wot's been grabbin' all de pies,
An' dividin' up de good t'ings since de flood —
Say, I wonder if *dey* knows
Wot it's like ta hunger, bo's —
Ta hunger till yer knock-kneed an' yer eyes are
seein' blood!

Hunger, is it hunger?
It's hunger widout end;
It's hunger fer a decent word
An' hunger fer a friend;
It's hunger fer a gal ya like
Er hunger fer yer bread —
Gawd o'mighty help yer, bo,
It's hunger till yer dead.

De t'ing dat makes ya sore
Is wot dey takes ya for —
Dey fills yer *gut* ta keep ya actin' mild!
But Gawd! I guess yer need

HUNGER

Is sump'n more dan feed! —

It's sump'n stickin' in yer throat, it's sump'n drives
ya wild!

Hunger, is it hunger?

It's hunger widout end;

It's hunger fer a decent word

An' hunger fer a friend;

It's hunger fer a gal ya like

Er hunger fer yer bread —

Gawd o'mighty help yer, bo,

It's hunger till yer dead.

COUNTRY RHYMES

THE HOME FIRE

THE home fire's a lazy fire
And wood it should be,
And the thoughts said about it
Begin with we.

The home fire's a cold fire
Time may come, and dead ;
Then there's the road to go
And the stranger's bed.

LITTLE THINGS

THERE'S nothing very beautiful and nothing very
gay

About the rush of faces in the town by day,
But a light tan cow in a pale green mead,
That is very beautiful, beautiful indeed . . .
And the soft March wind and the low March mist
Are better than kisses in a dark street kissed . . .
The fragrance of the forest when it wakes at dawn,
The fragrance of a trim green village lawn,
The hearing of the murmur of the rain at play —
These things are beautiful, beautiful as day!
And I shan't stand waiting for love or scorn
When the feast is laid for a day new-born . . .
Oh, better let the little things I loved when little
Return when the heart finds the great things brittle;
And better is a temple made of bark and thong
Than a tall stone temple that may stand too long.

ENTERTAINING

I WONDER if the high tree,
Four arms around
Ever feels its heart
Beating in the ground.

I can feel it, stretched here,
Shoulders in the sod,
And both ears open
To sounds from God.

Oh, the sun has shaken
The dirt beneath my soles,
And brought a wind from China
Singing round the Poles!

The thousand things I want
Are gathered in a row
From this spot of meadow
To the spring below. . . .

ENTERTAINING

All the fun and money
The world can boast
Have come away to visit
Here, where I am host!

DIGNITY

THE old gray cocks
Reach to your knees;
Their tall tail feathers
Dance in the breeze.

When they stop to talk
They stretch still higher
And peck you if you walk
Close to the wire.

The old gray cocks
Are prouder than a king,
And even when they scratch
It's a dignified thing.

THE LAST NIGHT

HADN'T we better rise and go
Down to the wood so ashen-white?
And you will give me a kiss I know
Since this is our last night.

I will give you a kiss indeed,
A kiss for this and a kiss for that!
And maybe a kiss to fill your need —
So go and get your hat.

This place is best of all, I think,
With the white star-blossoms in the grass,
And a whip-poor-will may come to drink,
And never a body pass.

This place is well enough, indeed,
To bind my soul and kill me quite,
For I shall never again be freed
From the kiss I give to-night.

THE TREE TOAD

A TINY bell the tree toad has,
I wonder if he knows
The charm it is to hear him
Ringing as he goes.

He can't have gone the journeys
He tells me to go on,
Here in the darkness
Of the cool, cropped lawn.

He cannot know the thrill
Of the soft spring wind,
Or the wonder when you walk,
What will come behind.

He hasn't seen the places
I'd break my heart to win,
Nor heard the city calling
When the cold comes in.

THE TREE TOAD

He sings away contented,
And doesn't leave his tree,
But he sets my blood a-going
Where his song will never be.

THE HORNS OF PEACE

NO man's life is open as the houses
Blindly he will build, houses of a dream;
Where many maids are running, clad in leather
blouses,
Running with white legs into a stream.

Blow, blow the horns, clearer in the morning!
Never let the world hear, though the music wake
Leaves on the ash-tree, and rose set thorning:
Let speech be over and no woman bake.

The ash-limbs are burdenless, the rose stands idle,
A'tremble with the horns, blowing far and sweet;
And even an old man will dream of a bridal
Seeing what he was when love was in his feet.

Blow, blow the horns, farther growing clearer!
I have seen my life and love as a cloud
A star will thrust a face through coming nearer. . . .
Never let the world hear a glad song aloud!

MYSTERIES

A DOG goes with you down to a pond
And he sticks his very nose in the dirtiest of
ground,
Where you wouldn't even sit in the oldest of clothes,
But a dog will do it, and why, God knows!

A boy grows up and he lives in a town
Where the prettiest girls walk up and down;
He looks at one a little and gives her a rose
And he's off to cut his throat . . . why, God knows!

A man ploughs ground and his sons grow big,
His wife gets thinner and she needs a wig;
He has money in the bank, in acres and in rows,
And beauty in his looks . . . why, God knows!

THE MAD WOMAN

SHE sat home long, the woman
Who came through our wood,
After years of seeing
But what her window could . . .

I wonder if the wild eyes
I saw as she passed
Found beneath the river .
What cleared their gaze at last.

I wonder if her face
Was not a girl's again,
And if she found the flowers
Thick about the glen ;

And if among her thoughts
So dark we couldn't see,
It only was her reason
Came to make her free.

THE OLD HOME

YOU would not find an elm so tall
As that one by the drive,
Nor a woman's body as dried and small
As hers and seem to thrive;
And there was a man of stormy frame
And beard unflecked with white
Who sat beside her bible-desk
In the lamp's old-fashioned light . . .
And these two had as different hopes
As ever two alive.

Somewhere was hung a girl's profile,
Black with gold-tinted hair,
And beside the polished Franklin burner
Was a long-backed walnut chair;
I had known these things all years ago —
Known them, and more than all
A certain owl that once had hooted
From near the milk-house wall;
And that dim room and that whole house
Had a grave, unlikely air.

THE OLD HOME

I thought of forgotten and dismal sounds
And remembered flawless days,
Until they fled back choking upon me
And the lamplight blurred to haze;
I felt the presences in that room
As a ceremonious thing . . .
And that small old lady sitting by
That dark man listening,
Smiled at him as a bride who was there
Smiled at her baby's ways.

We visitors, it was the dead we thought of,
For had one done his will
In that old house and that old room
It had shaken from the hill —
Roof and beam in a rain of dust
Upon that gathered group
And only the young feet would have sounded
Hastening, from the stoop . . .
So we, like the memories of the dead,
Were courteous and still.

THE DOOR

LOVE is a proud and gentle thing, a better thing
to own
Than all of the wide impossible stars over the heavens
blown,
And the little gifts her hand gives are careless given
or taken,
And though the whole great world break, the heart
of her is not shaken . . .
Love is a viol in the wind, a viol never stilled,
And mine of all is the surest that ever God has willed;
I shall speak to her though she goes before me into
the grave,
And though I drown in the sea, herself shall laugh
upon a wave;
And the things that love gives after shall be as they
were before,
For life is only a small house . . . and love is an open
door.

THE RIVER MAN

SHORT and lean and grey of eye,
He'll sometimes look up at the sky
And listen hard as if he heard
A sound where you'd not hear a word!

He rather thinks he's satisfied,
He'd better change before he died;
A fellow will get in a groove,
It had been best for him to move . . .

But often when he's busiest
With stock and chickens and the rest —
Bringing the fuel and cutting ice,
Or taking buckets to the sties,

Or pointing posts, up in the wood
Or other things a farmer should,
He'll stop clean off, and Lord knows why,
Listen and look up at the sky.

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

BORN are we of fire
And orderly desire,
And on that day
The leaves all pray
And the stars all wait
By the smallest wooden gate
To listen to the cry
Of a woman by and by.

And they gather in the door to see his little feet
And go away and whisper there are none more sweet;
And they peep in his eyes and laugh like a lord
To see another human that is not yet bored . . .
Old men and ladies, they go that way
And very, very silly are the things they say!

We are born of woman
And they say she is human
But we very soon know
She is more than so . . .

MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

For we drink from her cup
With the top closed up
And no matter how we press
It grows no less!

And she sits by the sky where the wind comes through
And knows what we want by the things we do.
And the sound of her voice is sweeter than her milk,
And the feel of her face is like smooth white silk . . .
And a man may be ninety with a very long beard
And not be any better than his mother feared.

TO A DEAD CLASSMATE

I REMEMBER going down there first
To that tawdry dark hotel,
Where you kept a big mahogany paint-box
And a dozen or more French books;
I remember how you looked at me
With worried, suspicious looks,
And curled your lip at something,
In the pride you could not quell . . .
Do you ever hear me asking now
If things with you are well?

All else at college was so little
When once my labours won,
And I was sure you were friends with me,
And went to that hotel
Seven times a week to that little room
With the country-parlour smell,
And talked of cities and poems
As a thousand boys have done,
But as neither you nor I had ever
Talked with any one.

TO A DEAD CLASSMATE

I remember hazy nights
And the columns white and high,
The columns so beautifully futile
Left from the old burned hall;
Like the white arms of a girl they held us
Who had known no love at all.
We lay and sent our hopes with smoke
Into the summer sky . . .
Do you hear me when I send to you
A question or a cry?

I remember how I came from there . . .
The little dark hotel,
And left a promise of Paris with you
As a girl might have left a kiss;
I remember the corners I turned to come
From there and the years to this —
I remember your parting diffidence,
The pride you could not quell . . .
Have you ever since heard me asking
If things with you were well?

THE INTERPRETER

IN the very early morning when the light was low
She got all together and she went like snow,
Like snow in the springtime on a sunny hill,
And we were only frightened and can't think still.

We can't think quite that the katydids and frogs
And the little crying chickens and the little grunting
hogs,
And the other living things that she spoke for to us
Have nothing more to tell her since it happened thus.

She never is around for any one to touch,
But of ecstasy and longing she too knew much . . .
And always when any one has time to call his own
She will come and be beside him as quiet as a stone.

DILEMMA

WHAT though the moon should come
 With a blinding glow,
And the stars have a game
 On the wood's edge . . .
A man would have to still
 Cut and weed and sow,
And lay a white line
 When he plants a hedge.

What though God
 With a great sound of rain
Came to talk of violets
 And things people do . . .
I would have to labour
 And dig with my brain
Still to get a truth
 Out of all words new.

THE DANCE

THERE'S three dances going on three hills
around
And twelve fellows out of here and forty from below;
And the girls, where they come from how can any
know?
But I'll be answer for it where one of them is bound.

The long way's the big road going by the spur
And the path through the woods is straighter than a
line;
I'll go by the big road to show them what is mine,
But the dark path coming is the way to take with her.

There's something like a pebble will be getting in her
shoe,
And something like a snake will be lying there to fear,
And maybe it will rain and maybe it will clear
But I'll be bringing Lizzie home the whole night
through.

OLLENDORF'S WIFE

DAY after day all day I've seen her in the fields,
Bending over the brown beds in which she has
worked

For twenty years and more.

There is no look of love for it in her face

Nor any memory of her brief lost grace of years
ago. . . .

Only she turns to the Earth, day after day,

As to her last child,

Or they will seem

Like equal enemies, who are drawn together

By knowledge greater than the common

Of each other's best.

At a certain hour

When the light is a perfect synthesis

Of calm beauty,

And the gathering veils of purple

Are pierced by rosy mists,

She stands as straight as she is able

OLLENDORF'S WIFE

And walks home,
Unforgettably a part
Of that sudden mysterious girlhood
Of the world.

THE CITY

SECOND AVENUE

IN gutter and on side-walk swells
The strange, the alien disarray,
Flung from the Continental hells,
From Eastern dark to Western day.

They pass where once the armies passed
Who stained with splendid blood the land:
But bloody paths grow hard with years,
And bloody fields grow rich and grand. . . .

Are you, O motley multitude,
Descendants of the squandered dead,
Who honoured courage more than creeds
And fought for better things than bread?

The eternal twilight of the street
Drives you to madness like a wine,
To bastioned gates with bleeding feet,
To walls that curse and locks that shine. . . .

SECOND AVENUE

O curious poison! Yellow fruit!
Bright lotos that enchains the sense!
That gives the maiden to the brute,
And power gives to impotence!

That gives to man his blindest wish
Of flaccid ease and flaming lust! —
For gold you have grown feverish
And song has fallen into dust. . . .

The gorgeous canvas of the morn,
The sprinkled gaiety of grass,
The sunlight dripping from the corn,
The stars that hold high-vestured mass,

The shattered grandeur of the hills,
The little leaping, lovely ways
Of children, or what beauty spills
In summer greens and autumn greys —

These are not gained by any toil
Of groping hands that plead and plod,
But are the unimpoverished spoil
Poured from the bursting stores of God.

How often when the spring is near
Has one of you forgot his cares

SECOND AVENUE

And gone, the Bridegroom of the year,
Filling with song the streets and stairs?

How often does the wild-bloom smell
Over the mountained city reach
To hold the tawny boys in spell
Or wake the aching girls to speech?

The clouds that drift across the sea
And drift across the jagged line
Of mist-enshrouded masonry,
Hast thou forgotten these are thine?

That drift across the jagged line,
Which you, O people, reared and built
To be a temple and a shrine
For gods of iron and of gilt . . .

Aye, these are thine to heal thy heart,
To give thee back the thrill of Youth,
To seek therein the gold of Art,
And seek the broken shapes of Truth.

O vaulting walls that drive the wind
To feats of such fantastic fun,
You make men dull, you make men blind,
You mar the ritual of the sun:

SECOND AVENUE

The dramas of the dawn you mar,
The streaming tapestries of dusk —
For fruit of life the visions are
And things are fibre of the husk . . .

Lo, these who all unthinking strive
To ports they do not dimly guess —
Can any arts among them thrive?
Can they be bred to loveliness?

By strange design and veiled pretext
God's will upon the race is told,
For one year does not know the next
And youthful still, the world grows old.

Yet maybe now there passes here
In reverential dream, a boy,
Whose voice shall rise another year
And rouse the sleeping lords of joy . . .

Beat on, ye thousand thousand feet,
Beat on through unreturning ways;
Not mine to say whereto ye beat,
Not mine to scorn you or to praise;

The world has seen your shining bands
Thrown westward binding sea to sea,

SECOND AVENUE

And heard your champing hammers drum
The music of your deity;

The world has seen your miracles
Of steel and steam and straining mass;
And yet shall see your builders mould
A finer temple e'er you pass . . .

You, having brothers in all lands,
Shall teach to all lands brotherhood;
And Labour, welding brain to hands,
Shall win the mighty to the good.

And on some far-off silent day
A thinker gazing on a hill,
Shall cast his staff and horn away
And answer to your clamouring will;

He shall bring back the faded bays,
The graces to their ancient rule,
The harper to the market-place,
The genius nearer to the fool.

THE LOOM-GIRL

FAR among the fields
White with carrot-bloom,
She walked by my side
Dreaming of her loom,

Her loom that ever called her,
Ruthlessly, and she
Was dumb in the starlight
And dumb by the sea.

Far among the sand-dunes,
Green with waving grass,
She walked by my side
A dream-lost lass.

But deaf amid the stir
And the dust of the loom,
She thinks of the sands,
And the wild carrot-bloom.

THE BATTLE OF MEN AND GOD

FROM age to age the spirits wage
Their endless strife with God,
The spirits that are brave and strong
And will not stoop nor plod.

From age to age the spirits lose,
For God lifts high his Hell
And strikes their struggling arms to earth
And scatters them pell mell.

Men have but two hands and a brain
And wills that often veer ;
God stands upon the topmost plain
And wields the sword of fear.

God owns the cops and teeming shops
And drives the motor cars ;
But hungry men still mock his power
As deserts mock the stars.

THE BATTLE OF MEN AND GOD

From age to age do stricken men,
Who yet shirk not to be,
Withstand the onslaughts of their God
As rocks withstand the sea.

FRANCES

I WILL love you, sir, a little,
But you can't expect me long
To sit here idly listening
To the negro-singer's song.

I have felt a touch of sadness,
For the talk is running low,
And night soon turns to morning
When the women rise to go. . . .

I will love you, sir, a little,
But with laughter not at all;
To-morrow I must waken
To another carnival.

THE WORKER

SHE sits where piles of britches
Shut in the poisoned air,
While you are at the beaches,
And I am at the Fair.

THE STRIP OF RIVER

UP in this tower tall and new,
I do not feel the call of you,
My hands keep flying here and there
Like shuttle-cocks in the crisp air;
I think of foolish things I do
And do not feel the call of you.

Up in this tower tall and new,
I turn and see a strip of blue
Far off between the stony hills,
Where one small sail leans round and fills;

There hovers like a mighty bird
The smoke above the turgid herd
Of great and little boats that sing
Their love-songs to the sea and fling
The light-shot spray like silver hail . . .
You fill me then as wind the sail.

GOLD

THE mountains fashioned, for a drug to sway
Earth's brawny sons from visions of the skies,
A gleaming metal that the living slay
To win, and dead men wear upon their eyes.

I thank them for it — that one day we woke
And walked the streets too desperate to will
Our footsteps, and then laughing quick, you broke
Our last ten cents to buy a daffodil!

OLD YOUTH

THE DAUGHTER

AND I will not have anything, not anything of thee,
Though all the days be longer than the long lines
of the sea,

And I will lay no healing kiss upon thy haggard brow,
For I came out from nothing and a little broken vow.

The sea all fain is of the sun, out from the ragged
lands,

And though they part and shatter faith, the grey wind
understands

The sun has loved the sea too much and loving is too
sore

To make a little plaything of and leave it on the shore.

And I will have no ready kiss to heal a broken vow
For all the winds forgot to sing a year and twenty now,
Forgot to sing the tidings of a love that had a day
And left a little plaything for the sea to take away.

SONG FOR THE LITTLE MISTRESS

BREATH of little zephyr bells
On the night air,
Do you bring me tiding?
Do you bring me tiding?
Moonbeam washing all the grass,
You who washed her hair,
Is my true love hiding?
Oh, where is she hiding?

She could not have gone to war,
She was far too weak for that,
Far too small and weak for that —
She has not become a star,
She was far too meek for that,
Far too young and meek for that!

Purple bit of slender grasses
In the tree's shade,
Can you tell me news of her?
Can you tell me news of her?

SONG FOR THE LITTLE MISTRESS

Fire-flies flitting here and there,
Seeming half afraid,
Who is it makes use of her?
Who is it makes use of her?

My true love cannot be dead,
She was far too soft for that,
Far too white and soft for that. . . .
Ah, she laid her in her bed,
They bore her aloft for that,
They bore her aloft for that!

THE MOON'S BETRAYAL

IN my garden
The grey bird weeps,
Crying for pardon
The grey bird sleeps.

Over the hedge
The slender moon
That heard her pledge
Broken so soon,

Is cold, is cold,
And his pale heart sorrows
With grief untold
For his loveless morrows.

In my garden
The grey bird longs,
Her eyes ask pardon
To break her thongs.

THE MOON'S BETRAYAL

But the moon, her lover,
Her virgin lord,
Shines cold above her
And speaks no word.

Ah, little grey bird
E'er the dawn-star shine,
The moon shall have heard
Your prayers and mine.

Ah, little grey bird
The moon will pardon
Our grief-sweet loves
In the moonlit garden.

And whiter than moonbeams
That over you shake —
White bird, white bird
You shall awake!

THE SILENT PLACE

OVER the eaves the milky way,
Over the portico the white moon,
Night's a masquerade of day
And February walks with June.

Cold the stone against my cheek,
Cold in the moon against my side . . .
He has a bride is chaste and meek
Who has Silence for a bride.

So gentle are her fingertips
I scarce can feel them on my brow,
So faint the pressure of her lips
They kiss and leave me wondering how.

Like votive youths the hedgerows stand:
Their tops are talking with the stars;
The city's rumble caravanned
Never their endless converse mars.

THE SILENT PLACE

Alone amid the garden there
I kiss the lips and slumbrous eyes
Of Silence and the folded hair
Of Silence — she whose sole replies

Are odours and unutterable
Low melodies, unsaid desires,
Songs of a beauty wrought too well
From too exquisitely tuned lyres.

THE MELODY

DEATH is a melody
I love to sing,
Death is a grey bird
With a bright wing!

Let me wear colours gay
During life's spell,
Let me wear Death, a flower,
In my lapel!

Death is a classic mould
Grave Grecian gourd —
Let me be melted
And into it poured!

TO J. S. P.

I. THE DEAD SINGER

SOFTLY give heed —
His love has taken wings,
Of earthly things
He had but little need.

The lips now mute
Sang freely from his heart,
His was an art
Sprung from the Attic lute.

What slender fether
Hung his brief life upon?
Would he have gone
So, had it not been better?

Swiftly he passed
Filling each day from morn —
Did each forewarn
Him that they would not last?

THE DEAD SINGER

Shall we not touch
 Ever his hand again,
Ever in pain
 Or when we love too much?

Where has the light
 Fled that was in his eyes;
Have not the skies
 Gained a new star as bright?

Peace, leave him then,
 Foolish is singing now . . .
He has learned how
 God makes the songs of men.

II. THE CORONAL OF DUST

WHY hast thou gone, O loving one, O mute!
Why hast thou gone who cannot sing or speak,
Or take my hand in laughter and salute —
There were so many things we thought to seek

Together e'er the ruddy springtime fled;
In eager youth to manhood we were bound,
The world smiled like a fairyland outspread —
And thou art lost, whom I had scarcely found!

The arduous days, the days of town and wold
Whose hours like jewels wove a coronal
To crown the love our hearts had learned to hold
As hand in hand we sought the festival!

Was it so little a love we held so deep
And grasped so eagerly forgetting death?
Or hadst thou stranger songs to find in sleep?
Or did the dust crave music of thy breath?

THE CORONAL OF DUST

I know not, O Beloved, I but know
 My days are barren and I pass alone . . .
I cannot come to think thee better so,
 Or know thee speechless as a roadside stone.

THE LAST POET

THE planet slain by lyric pain
Lay crushed against the Universe
And threw off rhyming molecules
And bits of quaint atomic verse.

The winds that had been torturing
Its surface with their flute-like tones
Were hushed to hear the mountains sing
Their parting diatessarons.

The seas were falling drop by drop
In vain revenge upon the sun
Seeking to put its glitter out,
The moon into a gold thread spun . . .

High up upon a distant star
Lolled sleepy-lidded Pierrot,
He plucked the strings of his guitar,
He sang and turned his eyes below.

THE LAST POET

“ I like to see the people dead,
I thought it was a merry din —
The rivers were a lovely red,
I lingered at the death of Sin —

“ Into the sea I saw one fling
His mistress drunk with love and wine . . .
I do not care for anything . . .
I only long for Columbine.”

THE ANSWER

“CRYING cranes and wheeling crows . . .
I’ll remember them,” she said;

“And I will be your own, God knows,
And the sin be on my head.

“I will be your own and glad;
Lovers would be fools to care
How a thing is good or bad,
When the sky is everywhere . . .

“I will be your own,” she said,
“Because your voice is like the rain,
And your kiss is wine and bread
Better than my father’s grain.”

So I took her where she spoke,
Breasts of snow and burning mouth . . .
Crying cranes and drifting smoke
And the blackbirds wheeling south.

THREE WOMEN

QUIESCENCE

HOW can I hide this from him,
How can I smile all the days,
And look into other faces
Because he leaves me to do all things
But one . . .

I cannot trouble him with this burden also
When the other is his.
Must we be always here together?
Must the days and the nights go on with him beside
me?
Must I watch him in sleep
When she comes to his dreams,
Waking a smile on his lips?
Must I be reverent before the joy that is not from me?
Must I sit here, helpless,
Never daring to turn the lamp higher?

But the lamp would not obey me,
I am not permitted even to touch him . . .

QUIESCENCE

O this is the shame of all,
That I shall guard him in his own,
And care for the new children of his moments,
As though they were mine . . .

Ah you . . . you . . . how can I blame even you,
My robber!
Only me who have done nothing,
I despise . . .
Would God my love would let go my hands
And I might kill him,
Here, quietly, in my own bed,
Him, whom my arms are empty for,
Here, beside me . . . without a kiss!

E POI VIDI VENIR DA LUNGI AMORE

I

I TELL you this, O my new lover —
When you are close to me
And I am so silent;
When you say troubling things
And I am so silent;
When you look so at my throat and hair,
When you look . . . and look . . .
It is not because I am stupid
That I am so silent.

II

The gowns of my mother, from an old chest
I have put on sometimes,
Wondering. O Impetuous One,
Those lips and hands would reach me
Through the coquetry of ten thousand years!

E POI VIDI VENIR DA LUNGI AMORE

III

Do you know
It is only because of you
That I gaze at myself in the mornings?
Do you know that I borrow your eyes? . . .
How I despise my beauty
Because of the clay that binds it!

IV

I do not want that and that and that,
I do not want it. . . .
When we were in the meadow
And I saved the moth you would have crushed —
See, it is the same in this,
A trifle that I must save.

V

I know that you come
Thinking to make me more happy,
To drink my draft of terror.
How can I tell you that no coming of yours
Will ever make me happy?

E POI VIDI VENIR DA LUNGI AMORE

VI

I will lose nothing by this;
The world has been given to me,
And it will not be taken away.
I cannot pay to God the dew
And the jessamine,
No . . . not for all your love.

VII

How you have dreamed of me!
What things you have known with me
After you have gone!
When you come again
I see that you have held me in your thoughts,
I have been with you like the smell of geraniums
After rain.
And I say, "Beloved . . .
Only this is left . . .
It is so little more that I can give you."

VIII

Ghosts of shadows,
These are our days,
Ghosts of shadows . . .
I cannot touch them,
And they pass over me but I scarcely move my eyelids.

E POI VIDI VENIR DA LUNGI AMORE

IX

O Courser . . . come to me.
You have the car of golden cloud;
It is shaped like a willow leaf,
And dipped toward me with a promise . . .
O Courser, come now!

X

What is my cruelty to you? . . .
Ah, if you but knew!
It is your comrade and bodyguard;
More than once it has saved your life
From the ugly spears.

XI

You do not know this,
That I revolt, I am uneasy,
I would see you thirst, and give you other water
 than myself;
I would hurt you and laugh at you.
Oh yes. . . . If I could find out how.

XII

How often have I wished
That we might trade garments,

E POI VIDI VENIR DA LUNGI AMORE

That I might dress you in my beauty
As I have worn your strength.

XIII

Look you into my eyes and tell me
What you see there.
Do you see the best of all things?
Do you see pictures like the gladness of immortals?
I fear you do not
Or you would go from me . . .
You would not love me for the best of all things.

XIV

How I have ridden and ridden
Until I am dizzy,
On the white way of your thoughts . . .
Only I sometimes wish they would let me go —
The paths that always lead me back to you.

XV

I did not believe any one would know,
I thought I had shut it in here, securely . . .
Who told the world this morning?
See how they hide their smiles
When they think I am watching.

E POI VIDI VENIR DA LUNGI AMORE

XVI

I am like my candle
Dipping in the wind,
But it never goes out . . .
Ah, will you not annihilate me utterly!

SALOME

THE fruit of that beauty
Was too heavy for my branch.
Here I lie flung upon the road
By storms that came too soon.

I have flowered
And borne no fruit;
I have bled
And borne no Spring.

What was music to me but one voice,
The soft dropping of leaves,
The rising of wind like a blade at dark-coming,
The snapping even of the twig that bore me!

O dim far wine of the sky,
I have ripened under you,
I have decayed under you . . .
I shall sleep under you.

EBB SAND AND STARS

EBB SAND AND STARS

I

FROM that last touch of fingers
The broken wire,
The message suspended
Over a desert of rain.

II

Peace . . . go,
And in strange places,
Unexpected turns,
You will find me.

III

Unforgotten?
Unremembered?
Does the river forget light
Or remember flowing?

EBB SAND AND STARS

IV

Here,
There will be sounds always
Of music beginning . . .
Born of that anguish.

V

Better to bless
Those steps of yourself,
Those flowered valleys,
With new grass.

VI

Peace . . . go . . .
Ah no . . . come closer.
Yes . . . go,
You cannot help come closer.

VII

Ebb sand and stars,
These be the healing mutes . . .
Beaten down are the sounds of the sea,
And I am alone . . .

EBB SAND AND STARS

VIII

The tree will whisper,
The window laugh,
The room hold me . . .
Trying to displace you.

IX

Yes, the wheat and the tares,
The able and pitiable things . . .
The sky of my memory of you
Floods them all.

X

I would go deeper
But I fear to tread the earth there,
I fear that crust.
There is all hell beneath it.

XI

And the nights,
They will be filled with lines,
That vainly try to express longing,
While the wind flaps a shutter.

EBB SAND AND STARS

XII

O temple bells!
O far Japan of that verandah!
Such grief will come
From a spiral vine with flowers . . .

XIII

The sumach will follow you,
The plum-bloom and redbud,
And the flowers of another summer . . .
But I shall not feel good-bye.

XIV

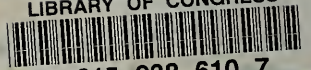
These things that I say
They will be as nothing
They will be as dead grass
They will be burnt up with flame.

THE END





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